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DE RUEHTU #0067 0221546
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 221546Z JAN 08
FM AMEMBASSY TUNIS
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4325
INFO RUEHJK/ARAB ISRAELI COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

UNCLAS TUNIS 000067

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

SIPDIS

NEA/IPA AND NEA/MAG (HOPKINS/HARRIS);
LONDON AND PARIS FOR NEA WATCHER

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: PGOV PREL KPAL TS
SUBJECT: TUNISIAN MFA STATEMENT ON CONCERN OVER SITUATION
IN PALESTINIAN TERRITORIES

REF: TUNIS 44

¶1. (SBU) Summary. On January 21, the Tunisian Foreign Ministry (MFA) released a statement regarding its concern about the situation in the Palestinian Territories. The statement received broad coverage in the Tunisian press, and government and ruling party newspapers carried the story on the front page. The statement comes less than ten days after the MFA issued a statement expressing satisfaction with President Bush's efforts to promote peace in the Middle East (reftel). Tunisian opposition parties close to the ruling party also released a similar statement on January 21. End Summary.

¶2. (U) On January 21, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) issued a statement that received wide coverage in the local media. Text of the MFA communique (official Tunisia-Africa Press Agency translation) is as follows:

Begin Text. Tunisia is following with great concern and deep anxiety the deteriorating situation in the Palestinian territories, especially in the Gaza Strip, which might result in a humanitarian disaster. While reasserting its rejection of the logic of force and all forms and practices of repression, as well as measures of blockade, sealing-off and disruption of all forms of re-supplying vital to the brotherly Palestinian people's daily life, Tunisia reiterates its call to the international community to urgently and efficiently intervene to put a halt to the Palestinian people's sufferings and guarantee to them the necessary protection. Tunisia considers that the persistent escalation represents a serious menace to the efforts and initiatives aimed to revive the talks, and to the future of the peace process, and compounds the region's complex situation. End Text.

¶3. (U) The Tunisia-Africa Press Agency (TAP), the official government news agency, also issued a statement quoting the loyal opposition parties Socialist Democratic Movement (MDS), People's Unity Party (PUP), and Unionist Democratic Union (UDU). According to the press release, the MDS (the largest opposition party in parliament), "voices deep concern about the escalation of the situation and the blockade imposed on the brotherly Palestinian people, reiterating the Movement's solidarity with and support to the Palestinian cause." The PUP, "expresses deep concern about the Israeli aggression against the Palestinian people's children in Gaza. PUP calls for an urgent Arab action to put an end to this aggression, stressing the need for the Palestinian national forces to start a broad national dialogue that would lay down a platform for an international consensus." The UDU condemned, "the Israeli attacks on the Gaza Strip and calls on all national and Arab forces to support the Palestinian people and work to lift the unfair blockade imposed on them." Per

the TAP press release, the independent Tunisian Bar Association also issued a statement supporting the removal of the "blockade."

GODEC